



CarSpot

As long as he can remember, Andrew Salamone wanted to be self-employed. A brief foray in general web development followed by a failed attempt to start a real estate web site, led Andrew to pursue an automotive niche, and, eventually to the creation of CarSpot.com.

Net Gains, LLC d/b/a CarSpot, a high-tech service company specializing in providing internet-based services to automotive dealerships, was founded in 1995 with 2 employees and 1 client. CarSpot has grown to 12 full-time employees servicing more than one hundred dealerships across Wisconsin, Illinois, Arizona and Indiana. With more than half of their growth experienced during the past twelve months, CarSpot expects to grow at an even faster pace in the foreseeable future. In the spring of 2001, Andrew secured an SBA LowDoc loan to consolidate his debts and establish permanent working capital to help streamline his finances.

CarSpot visits each of its member dealerships at least once a week to take digital pictures of the dealer's vehicles and collect vehicle data on handheld computers. Full-color vehicle specification labels are produced onsite and applied to each vehicle. These labels feature a direct URL that allows any consumer who visits a member dealership to later go home and pull up the vehicle information and picture on their PC.

CarSpot employees are issued a "branded" Volkswagen Beetle (bright yellow graphics on a black vehicle) to service the accounts. These Beetles have a printer inside that allows the employee to quickly service his/her accounts. The Beetles also serve as outstanding mobile billboards promoting the CarSpot service and web site. Once collected, the data and images are provided to consumers via:

- CarSpot's web site which averages between 3,000-4,000 visitors each day,
- Member dealers' web sites,
- CarSpot's network of Partner sites, and
- Any additional regional or local web sites requested by the member dealer.

Sharing data among other internet companies has helped CarSpot become an integral partner in their dealers' internet operations. Sharing the data and images CarSpot regularly collects has helped their member dealers to generate more sales and leverage their online investment. As a result, client retention has been superb. Should a dealer decide to scale back on internet related spending, CarSpot is typically the last company to be cut because it is the only one that does the data collection that ultimately feeds the other sites.

CarSpot's biggest challenge has been establishing a system to handle the logistics involved with making sure that all 100+ dealerships are visited at least once per week. In addition, they also have had to compete on price with various other "data collection providers" that do not offer the same level of technology and service.



To meet these challenges, CarSpot has used its technology to streamline their operations and keep costs down. They have automated their systems to:

- Provide scheduling to 100+ dealers in four states
- Provide inventory management of both window label stock and state DOT-mandated labels
- Provide data collection and processing support of such essential elements as VIN data, digital images, and automatic distribution of data to partner sites
- Provide automated invoicing and billing processes, including online bill payments
- Provide a web-based internal data system to allow each employee to interact and share information with each other regardless of time or location, and
- A fully automated payroll system

These technological enhancements have resulted in keeping clerical positions to a minimum while keeping other support expenses down as well.

The outlook for long-term business success looks bright. The following are being worked on in order to enhance future business potential:

- Breaking out “local” CarSpots online to allow users to search the entire database or opt to a particular state or location,
- The search engine is being rewritten to allow specific data searches, such as a zip code distance-based search, and
- Focusing on generating greater revenues from “non-traditional” sources including after-market vendors (car stereo installers, oil change centers, etc.), financial institutions, and “For Sale By Owner” listings.

Andrew has an older brother, Scott, and a younger sister, Margaret. Family is important to Andrew and he enjoys spending time with them whenever possible. Scott and a cousin, Jonathan, both work with Andrew at CarSpot. In his free time, Andrew enjoys working out and staying active. Favorite pastimes include jogging, hiking, kayaking, biking and taking road trips.